Master

FEATURES

"Soviet-U.S. Naval Competition in the Indian Ocean" by Alvin J. Cottrell and R.M. Burrell, Orbis XVIII, Winter 1975.

Despite the misleading title, the attached article concentrates on the increased Soviet presence in the Indian Ocean, the historical precedents for this build-up and the likely military and political consequences. The authors seem primarily interested in convincing U.S. policy-makers to strengthen the U.S. naval presence. Nevertheless, their insights should be useful for your background information.

Moscow's growing potential for political coercion in Indian Ocean states is highly exploitable. Naval power "has none of the potential provocation of a ground military presence" but can subtly apply psychological and political pressures on these littoral states. The authors maintain that many of the littoral nations favor an increased U.S. presence to counter the Soviet build-up

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SOVIET-U.S. NAVAL COMPETITION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN*

by Alvin J. Cottrell and R. M. Burrell

SOVIET interest in the Indian Ocean is the extension of the old czarist thrust for an outlet to the south, dating from the time of Peter the Great. That interest is overlaid with the ideological drive for worldwide Soviet hegemony. Increasing Soviet military might and decline of the European powers have sparked the present Soviet campaign to replace Britain as the dominant power in the littoral states. The Soviet navy has been aggressive in grasping the opportunity. In Iraq, Bangladesh, South Yemen and the Somali Republic, Soviet base-building has been active. Reopening of the Suez Canal will greatly benefit the Soviet naval presence, both militarily and commercially. The USSR's dominance serves both to protect its own interests in the area and to threaten the vital oil supplies of Europe and the United States. In extension to Africa, the Soviet buildup threatens to outflank Europe. Because the littoral states are accustomed to a great-power presence, the United States is expected to provide a balancing naval presence to reassure friendly powers and discourage Soviet-inspired expansion.

Analysts of Soviet global policy often distinguish between long-term and short-term objectives. The short-term aim is the reduction of Western political, economic and military influence wherever it exists, leading, in the medium term, to its elimination and, finally, to the institution of exclusive Soviet hegemony. This framework of analysis is useful, but on some occasions its use can blind us to the overall plan guiding Soviet activity. The Kremlin's ultimate objective is immutable — the creation of a world under Soviet paramountcy.

To gain this objective the USSR will use many techniques and the flexibility of Soviet tactics is too often ignored. Perhaps the greatest change in this respect in the last decade has been the creation of a powerful ocean-going navy and its use for a whole spectrum of political objectives. The development of the Soviet navy has presented the Kremlin with new opportunities, and the

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Soviet leadership has shown little reluctance to use them. This new dimension of Soviet power is nowhere more evident than in the Indian Ocean basin.

Many writers have commented upon the historical continuity between Soviet and czarist imperialism.[1] The drive for warm-water ports and an outlet to the great oceans of the world can be traced back to the days of Peter the Great and Catherine I. At the time of the Soviet-German talks of November 1940, Foreign Minister Molotov made it a condition of Soviet adherence to the four-power pact that the area south of Batum and Baku in the direction of the Persian Gulf be recognized as a center of Soviet aspirations. At the same time Stalin gained Italian and German support for the abolition of controls on the passage of Soviet vessels through the Dardanelles and the Bosporus, i.e., for the abrogation of the 1936 Montreux Convention. In October 1944, during the Yalta talks, Stalin demanded the right to establish Soviet bases on the Bosporus but this was refused. Soviet pressure on both Iran and Turkey was renewed in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War in the hope of extracting territorial concessions.

The parallel between Soviet and czarist policies was not limited to their objectives. They also shared a similarity of method in the move to increase political influence in areas contiguous to the Russian heartland. The expansionist drive was then continental, not oceanic. The USSR had come out of World War II as the world's strongest land power and was determined not to lose this position. The czarist legacy lingered on in modes of execution as well as reach of ambition.

The first signs of change came after Stalin's death in the mid-1950's, when Moscow began to develop its influence in countries beyond the borderlands of the Soviet Union. True, there had been such attempts before — the first treaty of friendship and commerce signed with an Arab country was that between the Soviet Union and the Yemen in November 1928 — but these were isolated, opportunistic events, unsupported by a consistent policy and rendered ineffective by the USSR's internal weaknesses and preoccupations in the interwar period.

The real push overseas did not begin until the mid-1950's and was not to become dynamic until a decade later. The circumstances that enabled the USSR to take this radically different ap-

[1] See, for example, Ben-Cion Pinchuk, "Soviet Penetration into the Middle East in Historical Perspective," in M. Confino and S. Shamir, editors, *The USSR and the Middle East* (Jerusalem, 1973); and S. Page, *The USSR and Arabia* (London, 1971).

proach were many — among them, certainly, the gradual ebb of European empires and the West's orientation toward peace; but a more important factor was the Soviet naval buildup that developed an effective surface naval presence capable of projecting itself to any quarter of the globe. In short, the Soviets always had access to "warm water" but previously they had lacked the requisite naval capability to make use of it. It was this fundamental change in the configuration of Soviet military power that enabled the Kremlin to pursue its long-standing aims. The expansion of the role of the Soviet surface fleet from being almost exclusively a defender of the homeland to serving as an important instrument of Soviet global diplomacy is perhaps the most significant change in the East/West equation that has occurred since the Soviet Union became a nuclear power;[2] for now that the Soviet leadership can hope to achieve sustained influence beyond its continental confines, it can advance the long-established objective of securing global political hegemony.

Indian Ocean Intrusion

Soviet willingness to use naval power has now been revealed on a global scale, from the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean to the South Pacific, but most remarkably in the area of the Indian Ocean, which was for so long regarded as a British lake. There is evidence that the presence of the Royal Navy had an inhibiting effect on Soviet policymakers, but this factor must not be overstressed, for the speed with which the Soviets moved a fleet into the Indian Ocean following the announcement of British military withdrawal is a clear indication of prior planning and decision-making.

Before 1968 Soviet activity in these waters had been confined to the regular oceanographic expeditions begun in 1955 and 1956. About two months after the announcement of Britain's intention to withdraw from the area, however, a small Soviet "flag-showing" force entered the Indian Ocean.[3] This force, including a light cruiser, a guided missile frigate and a guided missile destroyer supported by a fleet oiler and a merchant tanker, came from the Pacific Fleet based at Vladivostok, and during its four-month cruise

[2] On the details of this change see N. Polmar, *Soviet Naval Power: Challenge for the Seventies* (New York: National Strategy Information Center, 1972).

[3] R. M. Burrell and Alvin J. Cottrell, *Iran, the Arabian Peninsula and the Indian Ocean* (New York: National Strategy Information Center, September 1972). See also Alvin J. Cottrell, "The Political Balance in the Persian Gulf," *Strategic Review* (Washington: United States Strategic Institute), Winter 1974, pp. 32-38.

it called at Madras and Bombay, Karachi, Colombo, Basra and Umm Qasr in Iraq, the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, Aden at the entrance to the Red Sea, and Mogadishu in Somalia. Two further cruises, of smaller scope, were made in 1968. From the spring of 1969 onward the Soviets have maintained a permanent surface vessel presence in the ocean. In 1969 ships from the Pacific and Black Sea fleets united for the first time to conduct joint maneuvers in these waters, and by the end of that year Soviet vessels had visited nearly twenty Indian Ocean ports. As of January 1975, the Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean numbers some thirty ships, of which just under half are combatants. . . .

The essence of seapower lies in its flexibility, and the Soviets have exploited this fact to the full. They have, in fact, learned the lesson Themistocles taught at Salamis nearly two and a half millennia ago: "He who has command of the sea has command of everything." The pride the Soviets have taken in their Indian Ocean naval presence has been made clear on several occasions but nowhere more plainly than in the interview with Admiral S.G. Gorshkov, Soviet Naval Commander in Chief, entitled "On Ocean Watch," which was printed in *Pravda* on July 29, 1973 — Soviet Naval Day. After commenting on the increased importance now attaching to the navy in the Soviet armed forces, Gorshkov went on: "Ocean voyages and long distance cruises have become everyday activities for the Navy. This year many dozens of submarines and surface ships have graduated from the school of long distance cruises. The cruiser *Admiral Senyavin*, and the destroyer *Skrytnyy*, have thousands of miles of sailing in the Indian Ocean behind them."[5] Gorshkov also noted the increasing number of port visits made by Soviet ships and the task the navy was fulfilling in strengthening friendships between the USSR and foreign states.

Political Effects

The role of navies in cementing political ties is an old one. Oliver Cromwell, remembered primarily for his land battles during the English civil wars, is reported to have believed that "a man of war [i.e, an armed vessel] is the best ambassador," though it seems doubtful whether navies can actually create political ties. That navies can strengthen ties and show tangible commitment to an ally was well illustrated in Iraq during 1972. In the early months of that year the government in Baghdad felt politically isolated in the Arab world and believed that it needed external support before it proceeded with its long-sought aim of nationalizing the Iraq Petroleum Company. The Baathist regime was convinced that nationalization would precipitate active Western intervention against it. In February Saddam Hussein Takriti, Vice Chairman of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council, went to Moscow and reportedly spoke of Iraq's wish for "a solid strategic alliance with the USSR." The Soviet leadership welcomed the delegation warmly and was quick to seize the opportunity offered. Iraq's potential economic wealth, her oil supplies, her strategic location and increasing problems with Egypt after Nasser's death

[5] Translation available in *Strategic Review*, Winter 1974, pp. 105-106.

were all factors that influenced Moscow's decision; so too was the recent loss of Soviet influence in the Sudan and the fact that by building up a major presence in Iraq, pressure could be put on Iran and Turkey to modify their pro-Western stance.

On April 6, 1972, Premier Kosygin visited Baghdad and two days later signed a fifteen-year Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. On April 11 a Soviet naval squadron arrived at Umm Qasr, the Iraqi port at the head of the Persian Gulf, for a six-day visit. In this way the USSR was able to demonstrate immediately and effectively its degree of commitment to Iraq and indicate the value it placed upon that country's friendship. The naval visit was even more influential than might have been expected, for Iraq's navy was quite small while that of neighboring Iran was growing rapidly, and relations between them were deteriorating. To Baghdad, therefore, the presence of the Soviet ships was a welcome sign of support and reassurance — and a warning to Iran.

The local context of power is all-important in any discussion of the value and effectiveness of a naval presence. The Indian Ocean has, for nearly five centuries, been accustomed to the presence of outside navies — Portuguese, Dutch, French or British. Although much publicity has been given to the idea, first mooted by the Sri Lanka government, of making the Indian Ocean a zone of peace, free of the great powers, the idea of an external naval presence is nothing new and consequently requires little in the way of justification. The Soviet intrusion, while new in terms of geographic origin, is therefore no more than a repetition of the previous historical pattern; as one European navy (the British) begins to withdraw, another (the Soviet) comes to take its place. To some of the littoral states the new presence seems part of an established continuum, and Soviet protestations that the navy's purpose is purely peaceful and designed to preserve the status quo thus take on an aura of reality. The ease with which justification for a naval presence in the Indian Ocean can be achieved is a major asset in the deployment of naval force, and the Soviet Union has been quick to capitalize on this.

The history of naval power in the region has had other advantages for the USSR, too, for the mere presence of a vessel can sometimes be cited as the reason for certain events occurring when other factors were really the decisive ones. That the "mythical" effect of naval presence can be profitable for Moscow was shown in 1969 in Libya when the USSR claimed that the presence of its warships offshore was responsible for preventing a Western-supported royalist countercoup. The myth was widely disseminated — and quite widely believed — in the Arab world.

An example of real, as opposed to fictitious, Soviet support for an ally occurred in the aftermath of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war when Soviet vessels were sent to Bangladesh, at that country's request, for mine-clearing operations. The Soviet vessels were based in Chittagong and although they departed during the summer of 1974, they were there sufficiently long to have swept mines from the entire Bay of Bengal, not merely the approaches to Chit-

tagong harbor and the Ganges delta. At the end of June 1974 there were reports that Soviet vessels had entered the Red Sea to assist in clearing mines from the Strait of Jubal at the southern end of the Gulf of Suez. The importance of a permanent Soviet naval presence in this region needs little comment. Also, the Soviet helicopter carrier *Leningrad* has made a first trip to the area and is now deployed in the northwestern sector of the Indian Ocean.

The fact that Soviet vessels are capable of undertaking such tasks gives the USSR further opportunities for involvement in the affairs of the Indian Ocean states and justification for a peacetime presence. Acceptance of peacetime presence can make it even easier to justify an increased number of vessels at a time of impending or actual crisis. In these ways, the misgivings of the littoral states can be assuaged and the presence of a permanent Soviet fleet be made to appear not only natural but in their interests. By entering quietly, by building up a presence gradually, and by performing tasks for which it will be appreciated, the Soviet navy has already established a favorable basis from which expansion could follow without serious political risk. The U.S. policy of rapidly deploying more ships to the Indian Ocean at a time of crisis — as happened in 1971 and 1973 — has no such advantages. The expansion of facilities at Diego Garcia probably would not have provoked public political complaint had Washington pursued a more consistent policy regarding the level of its forces in the region.

Base Building

The Soviets have been careful in planning their Indian Ocean policy to make sure that the logistical infrastructure they have established is capable of supporting a much greater naval presence than the one currently being maintained.[6] They have laid the groundwork for a rapid expansion of their forces even without access to the Suez Canal. The chain of supply points, deep-sea mooring buoys and fleet anchorages established around the western and eastern coastlines of Africa is impressive and complete. The presence of a refueling task force off Conakry in Guinea is ample proof that the Soviets need no excuse of a pre-existent West-

[6] See *Means of Measuring Naval Power with Special Reference to U.S. and Soviet Activities in the Indian Ocean*, prepared for the Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs by the Foreign Affairs Division of the Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress (Washington: GPO, 1974), p. 12.

ern presence before they move into an area, and comforting delusions about mutual forbearance should be banished from the minds of Western policymakers without delay. The Soviet navy has mooring buoys off the Seychelles, off Mauritius and in the Chagos Archipelago as well as both north and south of Socotra.[7] Port Louis in Mauritius is used for fleet supply purposes and Soviet vessels have also made regular calls at Fernando Po and Conakry in West Africa. (The acquisition of permanent facilities in West Africa would also further Soviet support for Cuba and aid Soviet naval activity in the Caribbean.)

In June 1974 Frank Judd, the British minister responsible for the Royal Navy, said in Nairobi that the Soviet naval buildup was causing concern to the British government, as it began to appear that the USSR had aims well beyond those of parity with the other major seapowers of the world. The purpose of the Soviet expansion is a matter for urgent Western concern.

Although the Kremlin has made plans to support its Indian Ocean presence by sending supplies via the Cape route, there is much evidence to suggest that the real Soviet interest lies in the reopening of the Suez Canal. A map shows the advantages to be immediately obvious. To reach the Horn of Africa, the Soviet Northern Fleet based at Severomorsk in the Kola Peninsula must steam 11,200 miles if the Cape route is used, but only 7,300 miles if the Suez route is open. For the Baltic Fleet based at Leningrad, the distance is 10,800 miles via the Cape and 6,900 miles via Suez. The startling difference occurs in the case of the Black Sea Fleet based at Novorossiysk: the Cape route distance is 10,400 miles; the direct route, across the Eastern Mediterranean and through the Suez Canal to the Red Sea, is only 3,300 miles — a reduction of nearly 70 per cent.[8] The opening of the canal would cut transit times drastically. Without deploying any more ships than they have at the moment, the Soviets would gain flexibility by being able to increase their Indian Ocean presence substantially and almost immediately.

Moscow's interest in the Suez route has been indicated by the Soviet military and naval thrust in the region. Though the canal has been closed, the Kremlin has taken particular care since 1967

[7] See statement by Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt before the Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, *Proposed Expansion of U.S. Military Facilities in the Indian Ocean* (Washington: GPO, 1974), pp. 129-134.

[8] See map, *ibid.*, p. 42.

to maintain its contacts in ports in the Red Sea and around the Horn of Africa.[9] Soviet military and economic aid to the Yemen was, in the late 1950's and early 1960's, used to improve the facilities at the port of Hodeida, in the Yemen Arab Republic, and to deepen its approaches and roadsteads. When the British withdrew from what is now the People's Democratic Republic of South Yemen (PDRY), Soviet technicians provided assistance in the management of harbor facilities at both Aden and Mukulla. Current Soviet military aid to the PDRY is believed to exceed $40 million a year.

Across the Red Sea in the Somali Republic, port facilities at Berbera have been developed by the USSR to allow for the accommodation of vessels up to 12,000 tons. (The Somali Republic's navy, it should be noted, consists of ten motor torpedo boats manned by a total of 300 men, so the facilities are scarcely for local use.) SAM missiles have been installed to defend the port, and in 1972 a Soviet communications station was erected there. Facilities were further improved with the building of more than a dozen oil storage tanks at Berbera. Air facilities in Somalia would certainly assist the USSR in both air surveillance and fleet support operations, and the Soviets are currently engaged in building a new military air facility at Mogadishu. There can be no doubt, despite Soviet and Somali denials, that these construction projects are on a major scale.

In fact, it may be said with all certainty that the Soviets will have facilities in Somalia as good as — perhaps better than — the United States will have in Diego Garcia even after the additional funds which both Houses of Congress approved in September have been put to use. Final consideration of the bill has been delayed until March 1975 when the new Congress takes it up. The House voted for the full appropriation of $29 million but the Senate reduced the bill by about $11 million; final passage was held up due to a Senate provision that the President of the United States recertify that Diego Garcia was a national security requirement. Thus, the outcome of the Administration's policy to enhance the value of Diego Garcia is still in doubt, especially given the more liberal-to-left configuration of the new Congress.

The opening of the Suez Canal almost certainly will lead to more Soviet naval-air deployment in the area. Soviet air forces are already using the former British airfield near Aden. The

[9] See M. Abir, *Red Sea Politics* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper No. 93, 1972).

United States has meanwhile advanced a request to make use of the island of Masirah, which Britain has been given the right to use as a base by the Sultan of Oman. While Masirah is not a replacement or a substitute for the Diego Garcia facilities, which are much more valuable from a naval standpoint, the right to use the island would help to improve the psychological and operational position of the United States in the Persian Gulf/Oman area. Since no authorization of funds is involved, the United States — if permission were granted — could operate from Masirah without Congressional approval. It has been reported that as a staging area the base could accommodate as many as 40,000 men[10] and has a large airstrip, but it could not be made into a satisfactory naval base without substantial expenditure.

Those writers who point out that the U.S. Sixth Fleet would also gain proximity advantages by the opening of the Suez Canal should note that the present draught of the canal is only thirty-eight feet. That limitation and the tightness of some of the canal's curves would prevent the principal combatant vessels of the Sixth Fleet — aircraft carriers of the *Enterprise* and *Forrestal* classes — from making passage from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea. No Soviet vessel, however, including the new 40,000-ton *Kiev* aircraft carrier, is too large to sail through the canal.[11]

Commercial Penetration

Soviet commercial use of the Suez Canal and Indian Ocean is another factor worthy of consideration.[12] In the pre-closure period (1960-1966) the USSR increased its use of the canal faster than any other country except Japan. By 1966 the Soviets were seventh in the table of users with over ten million tons of shipping transiting the canal in the last full year of its operation. Soviet petroleum trade, unlike all the other oil trade, was a southbound flow from Black Sea oil ports to North Vietnam and other Asian countries. The recent oil deals with India would be much easier for the USSR to fill if Suez were now reopened. Soviet general cargo vessels also made much use of the canal, particularly to South and Southeast Asia. When the canal is reopened, the activities of the Soviet merchant fleet will be substantially increased and the prospect of competition for Western shipping lines will become

[10] *Christian Science Monitor*, January 21, 1975.
[11] For a discussion of the Soviet aircraft carrier *Kiev*, see R. M. Burrell and Alvin J. Cottrell, "More Power to the Navy," *Soviet Analyst*, November 1, 1973.
[12] See G. S. Sick, "The USSR and the Suez Canal Closure," *Mizan* (London) September 1968, pp. 91-98.

even more acute. In addition, Soviet shipping may be able to use the Suez Canal free of charge by offsetting canal dues against Egypt's huge debt to the USSR.

Soviet merchant shipping development has followed closely the pattern of naval growth — newer and better ships in larger numbers. The USSR already has the third largest merchant fleet in the world and ranks sixth in terms of carrying capacity.[13] The Soviet vessels are, generally speaking, smaller in size than those being built by Western shippers but this gives them greater flexibility for trade with many of the smaller and less well equipped ports of Africa and Asia. The development of larger ships has not, however, been ignored by the Soviet Union. *Pravda* reported on August 26, 1973 that the 180,000-ton tanker *Crimea* was nearing completion at the Kerch shipyard, and the January 1974 issue of *Soviet Military Review* carried a description and drawing of a 370,000-ton tanker currently being built.

Soviet Oil Posture

The existence of these ships provides an interesting prospect for the Soviet oil trade.[14] In the past the USSR has striven to maintain an autarkic position with regard to petroleum supplies and has also endeavored to supply almost all the oil needs of its satellites, including Cuba and North Korea. The maintenance of exports to the West has likewise played a large role in Moscow's policy, for oil has been the Soviet Union's largest single source of hard currency for several years. Oil has also been used as a means of gaining entry to African and Asian trade. The major problem is that the older oil fields in the Caucasus and Volga regions are now drying up and emphasis is shifting to the Eastern Siberian fields, which, given the backwardness of Soviet oil technology, are difficult and expensive to develop. That is why the Soviets are interested in getting American and Japanese firms to provide the capital and expertise to develop these areas. The USSR and its East European states are using more oil — even though they are still primarily pre-automobile economies — and the pressure on supplies is beginning to become serious. Soviet crude oil production in 1972 fell short of its planned level, and the rate of increase in output was one of the lowest for any year since the end of the Second World War.

[13] Polmar, *op. cit.*
[14] See A. Wolynski, "Soviet Oil Policy," in *Soviet Objectives in the Middle East* (London: Institute for the Study of Conflict, 1973), and R. M. Burrell, "The Soviet Union and Middle Eastern Oil," *Soviet Analyst*, January 4 and 18, 1973.

Shortages are therefore developing. The COMECON partners were warned more than seven years ago that they would need to look for external supplies, and they have been doing so increasingly since 1970. Some U.S. estimates have put Soviet-bloc oil imports for 1980 at eighty million tons, and this figure must be worrying Moscow. On the one hand, it will be concerned to see its control over the satellites' energy supplies diminish, and, on the other hand, it will wish to maintain the level of its hard currency earnings and gain further penetration of the African and Asian oil markets. Some temporary respite has been gained by the general increase in world oil prices, for these will allow the USSR to increase the level of hard currency earnings without increasing the actual volume of oil traded. This in turn will allow more oil to be devoted to the Third World oil markets, which are important politically, but for which only relatively small supplies of oil are needed.[15] In general, however, the USSR will need more oil imports if she is to retain control of her satellites' supplies, and steps have already been taken to secure them — notably in Iraq. The Iraqis are reported to be somewhat unhappy about the various deals, for it seems that the oil is priced at less than the prevailing market value and the quality of Soviet barter goods is lower than the Iraqis find satisfactory.

The evidence therefore points to increasing Soviet involvement in the Middle East oil trade — at least until the Siberian fields begin to produce. The Soviet bloc probably has no long-term absolute shortage of oil (its reserves are believed to be about 15 per cent of the global total compared with 6 per cent for the United States),[16] but the near-future position is much less certain. Soviet and satellite oil consumption is rising, though its current per capita level is less than 30 per cent of that in the United States, and it has been reliably estimated that COMECON may be a net oil importer by 1976-1977. This fact alone gives the Kremlin another reason to be interested in the constellation of naval forces in the Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf region.

Economic Warfare

Denying oil to the West, however, has been — and remains — the primary Soviet interest. The Soviet Union gave full propaganda support to the Arabs during the October 1973 war for their

[15] See R. M. Burrell, "Soviet Oil Exports: A Change of Emphasis?," *Soviet Analyst*, April 11, 1974.
[16] British Petroleum Company, *Statistical Review of the World Oil Industry, 1973.*

policy of restricting oil production and imposing a total embargo on exports to the United States and the Netherlands. Indeed, Moscow had long been urging such a policy and was undoubtedly pleased by the chaos and disunity it caused within the Western alliance.[17]

The military effects of that crisis received too little attention. The Bahrain refineries, for instance, supplied much of the oil for the U.S. Navy's Indian Ocean and Western Pacific operations, and the Sixth Fleet drew its supplies from the Middle East-fed refineries at Naples. A restriction of Middle Eastern supplies at a time of crisis would seriously undermine NATO's ability to respond to a threatening posture from the Warsaw Pact forces. The restriction in Persian Gulf supplies would be relatively easy to achieve: mines could be laid by "persons unknown" — or even by Palestinian guerrillas with skilled "assistance" — either in the approach channels to the handful of major oil-loading terminals in the Gulf or in the narrow shipping lanes of the Strait of Hormuz. The Soviet Union's construction of improved naval facilities at Umm Qasr, which Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, then Chief of U.S. Naval Operations, believed to be "considerably more extensive than any which would be required for Iraqi needs alone,"[18] should be seen against a scenario of potential threats to Western interests. The one-year termination notice placed on U.S. naval facilities on Bahrain by Sheikh Esa, Bahrain's ruler, in October 1973, during the Arab-Israeli conflict, has now been withdrawn. But the U.S. naval presence there will continue to be a political hostage and a source of controversy in the increasingly radical Bahrain parliament. Bahrain is one of the countries in the Persian Gulf where domestic tension is most likely to spark conflict, for it is one of the few Gulf states which has a large body of skilled labor dissatisfied with its present lot.

The problems caused by the temporary and relatively small-scale interruptions to energy supplies during the 1973 war should give the Western powers every encouragement to review the level of their naval presence in the Indian Ocean. This, it must be stressed, would be a move welcomed by many of the littoral states — particularly those whose incomes depend on the free flow of oil. The littoral states have long regarded the use of naval power for the defense of trade as a rational and legitimate exercise of

[17] R. M. Burrell, "The Oil Weapon—Who Gains Most," *Soviet Analyst*, November 15, 1973; and Walter Laqueur, *Confrontation: The Middle East and World Politics* (New York: Quadrangle, 1974), Chapter 6.

[18] Zumwalt Statement, *op. cit.*

national sovereignty. They are likely to read the lack of such a prudent policy as a sign of weakness or disinterest or both, and thus to reconsider the value of friendship with the West, thinking: "If the Western powers won't defend their own vital interests, how can we ever expect them to help in the defense of ours?" Without the traditional commitment of a naval presence — manifested in frequent and sustained port visits — the West could lose the allegiance of those who genuinely seek its friendship but understandably require some expression of tangible support and interest in return. This would be especially true of states sharing a common border with the USSR — such as Iran — where both territorial and maritime activity could be used by the Soviets in peacetime to bring political pressure to bear.

Analysis of Soviet naval activity over the past six years indicates a concentration on the northwestern sector of the Indian Ocean and on the acquisition of logistic supply points off the east coast and Horn of Africa. The evidence suggests that the Kremlin is pleased with the progress made in those areas and that all the necessary steps have been taken to make maximum use of the Suez Canal when it is again in operation. A simultaneous move to secure facilities elsewhere in the Indian Ocean basin can therefore be expected. The Soviet navy has recently secured bunkering rights at Mauritius and Singapore, but the most startling request was for permission to build a satellite tracking station in Australia.[19] In the view of U.S. authorities such facilities could be used to intercept Western military communications and to gain strategic information of great value to the Soviet armed forces. The equipment installed could also have been used to jam Western diplomatic and military communication channels. Although this request was refused by the Australian government, Soviet activity in the southern Indian Ocean continues unabated.

Soviet scientists are carrying out atmospheric and meteorological research with French cooperation on the Kerguelen Islands, situated about halfway between South Africa and Australia. Soviet oceanographic and other intelligence activity, which began in a small way in the late 1950's and has been maintained at a much higher level since 1968, has gathered a great amount of information about subsurface currents, changes in water density, variations in salinity, and temperature gradients in the Indian Ocean. This information is extremely valuable in allowing submarines to use "blind zones" where techniques of sonar location are rendered

[19] *New York Times*, April 2, 1974.

inaccurate and ineffective. Soviet vessels are also used regularly to gain intelligence and monitor Western communications. A demonstration of this occurred in January 1971 at the time of the British Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in Singapore, when four Soviet vessels passed through the Strait of Malacca, doubtless endeavoring to monitor diplomatic wireless communications connected with the conference. Their presence provided a dramatic indication that the Soviet navy was now using the Indian Ocean as freely as the British navy had once done.

In addition to using the Indian Ocean to outflank the West's allies in Asia and taking a position to threaten Western oil supplies in a time of crisis, the USSR is also keen to use the ocean to expand Soviet influence along China's southern flank. Peking's awareness of this aim may well account for what appears to be a degree of Chinese approval for U.S. expansion of the Diego Garcia facilities. There are some signs that Moscow is now beginning to seek to counter Chinese relations with East Africa and to gain more influence in Tanzania. The greater interest recently shown in Malagasy and Mauritius would also fit this pattern.

Hence, the USSR's naval presence in the Indian Ocean is being used in the broadest sense, both as a strategic weapon and as a means of projecting Soviet power in a new area of the world. No longer is the navy confined to its former role of defending the Soviet homeland: it is now a "blue water" fleet and it is used to further the Soviet Union's global objectives. Its success confirms that seapower is an eminently effective means of cementing alliances and of detaching countries from their former friends. The presence of Soviet ships in the Indian Ocean has ensured for Moscow a seat at the conference table on a whole series of issues where previously the Soviet voice was not heard, and is enhancing Moscow's image at the expense of the West — and of China — on all that ocean's shores.

Restoring Balance

To many of the littoral states, the West appears to have lost interest in them, and their genuine desire for friendship has thereby been sapped. Unless the historic ties are restored the erosion of Western influence will be hard to halt. The presence of Western navies in the Indian Ocean has traditionally been accepted as an advantage; if it is lost, it can only give the USSR a "free ride" in the region. Those people who desire the West's friendship must be given evidence of sustained support so that they can resist the

political and psychological pressures put upon them to change their allegiance.

Naval power is ideal for this purpose. It is flexible, it has none of the potential provocation of a ground military presence, and it has historical acceptance in the area. Its uses are manifold. It can give valuable aid in times of disaster and can demonstrate a visible sign of interest by the flag power. It can deter harassment and blackmail from enemies and can provide a safe means of evacuating civilians in time of crisis. It gives its possessor the opportunity to choose from a wide spectrum of roles. It can command the respect of enemies and stiffen the confidence of friends. What matters is its existence, rather than the purpose for which it was built. Francis Bacon knew this. Writing "Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates," in the seventeenth century, he said, "To be master of the sea is an abridgment of Monarchy — this much is certain, that he who commands the sea is at great liberty, and may take as much or as little of the war as he will. Whereas those that may be strongest by land are many times nevertheless in great straits."

When the issue of enhancing the facilities on Diego Garcia was being discussed in Washington, Indian opposition to the project — motivated at least in part by India's desire to maintain Soviet protection against China — was given much publicity. Other countries stridently echoed India's voice — Sri Lanka, Iraq, South Yemen (PDRY), Somalia and Malagasy. It should be noted that three of the latter states, i.e., Iraq, the PDRY and Somalia, are Soviet "clients" whose opposition is therefore open to the suspicion of external influence. Indeed, it has been suggested in the highest American circles that any increase in the U.S. presence in the Indian Ocean will provoke the Soviets to augment their naval forces there. . . .

Senator Claiborne Pell has argued that if we develop Diego Garcia we will be the first to establish a naval base in the Indian Ocean, and this will provoke the Kremlin into strengthening its own position.[21] Whether one calls it a base or facility, the Soviets have already built the first one in Somalia and thus are already ahead in air and naval facilities in the region. The extent of their activity in Somalia is almost completely ignored by such critics as Senator Pell and retired Rear Admiral Gene LaRocque.

Another segment of opinion, in the United States and worldwide, believes the United States can deploy a large-scale naval force in the Indian Ocean quickly. One of the most unfortunate statements to this effect appeared in the controversial United Nations report on the Indian Ocean. It read as follows:

On 1 January 1972 the operational area of the United States Seventh (Pacific) Fleet was extended into the Indian Ocean (The *New York*

[21] Statement of Senator Claiborne Pell to Subcommittee on Military Construction, U.S. Senate, printed in *ibid.*

Times, 22 March 1972). According to various reports in the United States press, in March 1973 the United States aircraft carrier *America* was in that Ocean. Between October 1973 and December 1973, an Essex-class aircraft carrier, the *Hancock*, accompanied by four destroyers and an oiler, were deployed and between December 1973 and January 1974 the United States Navy deployed another aircraft carrier, the *Oriskany*, with four destroyers and an oiler, in the Indian Ocean. Simultaneously, the United States nuclear-powered frigate *Bainbridge* was also sent into the Ocean. In March 1974 the more modern and larger aircraft carrier, *Kitty Hawk*, was sent in along with four destroyers and some supply ships; the *Bainbridge* was then withdrawn.[22]

To the uninformed it would appear that the United States had three attack carrier forces deployed in the ocean simultaneously. Actually the carrier in each instance was simply replacing another carrier as it departed, and the number of ships in the supporting force remained the same. Instead of eighteen ships or more, as suggested by this statement, the force always remained at a level of six or seven vessels.

Meanwhile, during the past year, ever more sophisticated Soviet ships have been deployed in the Indian Ocean. The Soviet presence has been augmented on two separate occasions by visits of *Sverdlov*-class cruisers. Two *Kresta II*-class cruisers (among the most modern Soviet ships), a C-class nuclear-powered cruise-missile submarine, and a V-class nuclear-powered torpedo attack submarine have also operated there briefly while transferring from the Baltic and Northern fleets to the Pacific Fleet. These surface ships and submarines are, according to reliable sources, the first of their kind to operate in these waters.

Iran, Pakistan, Singapore and, interestingly, the People's Republic of China have indicated publicly that they favor an enhanced U.S. presence. Several of the other littoral states — particularly the oil producers of the Gulf — are known privately to support a greater U.S. naval presence, but they would prefer to see more positive proof of the U.S. commitment, evidenced quantitatively as well as qualitatively, before declaring their views publicly. These states have no desire to see the Soviet Union achieve a naval monopoly in the area, but without U.S. support they must submit to the trend.

When the views of the littoral states are given individual examination, the simple assumption that they oppose a greater U.S. presence will be found to be baseless. If one counts the various

[22] United Nations *Ad Hoc* Committee on the Indian Ocean, "Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace," July 11, 1974, p. 11.

states in the northwestern ocean, from Iran to the Horn of Africa, a decisive majority either officially or unofficially favors a U.S. presence on Diego Garcia and thus a naval presence in the Indian Ocean. Even Bangladesh is reported unofficially to favor the expansion of the American facilities as a counter to India's increasing influence over its policies and to the growing Soviet presence. Some other states that have declared publicly against the U.S. plans did so largely for domestic political reasons: in Australia, for example, the Whitlam government's criticism was influenced by local electoral tactics, and Indonesia's criticism, too, was for public rather than for official consumption.

In the context of circumstances in the Indian Ocean today, no one has described the role a naval presence can play better than Admiral J. C. Wylie. In discussing the Sixth Fleet's political utility and the special kind of diplomatic influence naval forces can exert, he wrote:

> . . . by the nature of a navy, its special capabilities and limitations, it is particularly close to the diplomats in the State Department. . . . In the Navy the nation has a uniquely useful and versatile tool which can be applied overtly or covertly, directly or indirectly, actively or passively, but almost always effectively at whatever may at any moment be in the national interest.[23]

It is obvious that the Soviets recognize the valuable diplomatic role the naval forces can play. As James McConnell and Anne M. Kelly write in their penetrating analysis of the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war:

> The crisis certainly revealed the high value now placed by Moscow on coercive naval diplomacy. Despite diverse Soviet efforts in this field in recent years, doubt has persisted concerning whether this is a significant factor in its own right in the Soviet calculation or basically a by-product of Russian preoccupation with strategic defense of the homeland. Previous Soviet crisis initiatives and reactions either had ambiguously intermingled strategic aspects (Jordanian crisis) or involved the expenditure of relatively modest naval resources (West African Patrol). However, strategic defense was clearly not a Soviet consideration in December 1971; the British Far East Fleet had been in the Indian Ocean for more than a month before the war broke out without prompting reinforcements from Vladivostok. Soviet deployments during the crisis were dictated by the needs of diplomacy. Their magnitude demonstrates conclusively the significance of this factor in Soviet naval policy.[24]

[23] See J. C. Hurewitz, editor, *Soviet-American Rivalry in the Middle East* (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 60.

[24] James M. McConnell and Anne M. Kelly, "Superior Naval Diplomacy in the Indo-Pakistani Crisis," in Michael McGwire, editor, *Soviet Naval Developments: Capability and Context* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 451.

To those who say that a Western naval buildup would be a threat to peace, it should be pointed out that a balance of forces is a guarantee of peace — often the only guarantee. It was the fact that Soviet and American naval forces were of large but comparable strength in the Eastern Mediterranean in October and November 1973 that smoothed the way for diplomacy; had either side been in a position of overwhelming superiority the path to the conference table would have been much more difficult.

The danger in the Indian Ocean is that the USSR could achieve a position of dominance in an area where the lessons of naval power are still deeply imprinted on the diplomacy of the littoral states. The states of the region know the value of naval power, but they lack their own. They contain over one-third of the world's population. Thirty of them have freed themselves from colonial status since 1947 but historic tensions remain high between many pairs of neighbors.

In this milieu the Soviet Union has no need to create tensions, merely to exploit them. The temptation to settle disputes by force prevails throughout the world, but it can become acute when one great power wields predominant influence and when the country seeking change is a client of that superpower. The essential question is whether or not the West can allow the USSR — whose interests in so many instances lie in altering the status quo — to achieve a position of potential naval hegemony in an area where conflicts abound and where air and maritime power can be decisive. If the USSR does achieve such a position, Admiral Zumwalt's view that the Indian Ocean is the area with the greatest potential to produce major shifts in the global power balance over the next decade may prove to be disastrously accurate. It is highly desirable that the U.S. presence in the Indian Ocean be adequate to support, politically and psychologically, our diplomacy in the region.